

The ABCs of hepatitis



Millions of Americans are living with hepatitis today, and many don't know they have it. Hepatitis can be serious and can lead to lifelong health problems. To help fight this dangerous disease, it's important to know how it is spread and what you can do to prevent it.

What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Without the liver, the body cannot process nutrients, fight infection, or filter the blood. Hepatitis can make someone very sick. Some people with viral hepatitis can get liver cancer or severe scarring of the liver, known as cirrhosis.

How does someone get hepatitis?

The three most common types of viral hepatitis are spread in different ways:

- Hepatitis A can spread if a person eats or drinks something that has been contaminated with the virus. A person with hepatitis A spreads the virus through their stool.
- Hepatitis B can spread when blood, semen or other body fluids from an infected person get into the body of another person. This can happen during childbirth, sexual contact, getting tattoos or piercings, sharing needles or medical equipment, or sharing personal items, such as razors.
- Hepatitis C spreads through blood. Sharing needles or personal equipment that comes into contact with blood is the main way it gets spread. It may also spread during sexual contact. Like hepatitis B, Hep C can infect a baby during childbirth if the mother has it.

How do I prevent hepatitis?

Many people don't have symptoms of hepatitis and don't know they are infected. This means they can spread it to others without knowing it.

The best ways to help prevent the spread of hepatitis are:

- Getting the vaccine, if needed. Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B.
- Getting screened for hepatitis if you are at risk and getting treatment when available.
- Being aware of risk factors and avoiding them whenever possible. This may include not sharing needles or other personal equipment as listed on this page. Use latex condoms during sexual activity.

Is there a cure for viral hepatitis?

Most people who get hepatitis A will recover after a few weeks or months.

People with hepatitis B may need to be checked regularly for liver damage, and the infection may be lifelong. Hepatitis C can often be cured with today's advanced medications.



Ask your doctor if you are at risk for hepatitis and whether you should be screened or vaccinated.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization